Visiting Investigators Strengthen Research Efforts While at DIR

Each year, the DIR hosts visiting scientists from across the US and around the world through its Visiting Investigator Program (VIP). The VIP allows tenured or tenure-track professionals to spend up to a year in DIR laboratories learning research technologies, developing research collaborations, or pursuing a sabbatical research project.

The 1998 awardees hope that their research efforts will lead to better treatment of Parkinson's disease, Batten disease, and breast cancer.

Georg Auburger, MD

Germany's Georg Auburger is pursuing genetic leads on Parkinson's disease. Auburger, a neurology professor researching inherited ataxias and dystonias in his homeland, arrived in the U.S.after having collected blood samples from over 200 patients in Germany, Spain, Portugal, and Yugoslavia with familial Parkinson's disease. Collaborating with Robert Nussbaum's lab, he is screening these DNA samples seeking alterations for Parkinson's disease. Auburger is convinced the treatment of Parkinson's will benefit greatly from looking into the genetic basis of the disease.

Hannah Mitchison, PhD

Hannah Mitchison, University College, London, is focusing on Batten Disease, a rare and fatal inherited neurodegenerative disease that strikes seemingly normal children and infants; symptoms include blindness, seizures, mental impairment, and the loss of motor skills. Although researchers discovered a gene that causes Batten disease, they still know little about its evolution. Mitchison is spending her time here designing a mouse model for Batten's. The long-term goal is to test new kinds of therapies to more effectively treat the disease.

Carolyn Whitfield-Broome, Ph.D.

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Howard University's Carolyn Whitfield-Broome is focusing her efforts on studying the BRCA 1 and BRCA 2 genes in African-Americans. The two BRCA genes account for approximately three to eight percent of breast cancer cases. Whitfield-Broome is analyzing DNA samples for alterations that may be specific to African-Americans. She is searching for a change in a particular protein, investigating whether it's truncated or shorter. Her research goal is to make it easier to pinpoint African-Americans who are at heightened risk for breast cancer. ●

http://www.nhgri.nih.gov/DIR/VIP/vip.html

DIR HONORS FIRST RETIREE

On May 1, Genome employees gathered to celebrate the Institute's first retiree: Patsy Frye. She was an NHGRI employee since early 1995, but her NIH career spanned 36 years.

"Patsy exemplified commitment and competence," says NHGRI scientific director, Jeffrey Trent. "As the Institute's first retiree, she has indeed set a standard for others to emulate."

Frye joined the DIR in 1995 as deputy administrative officer and played a major role in recruiting personnel for the DIR.

"Patsy and I worked as a team at Genome for several years," says Frye's supervisor, Linda Adams. "As I look back it's easy to see that our overall challenges and successes wouldn't have been possible without a person of her caliber, her professionalism, and her constant diligence."

Frye joined NIH in June, 1962. She worked at several institutes over the ensuing 36 years, assuming progressively more responsible positions—an effort that was recognized with the NIH Director's Award.

A jubilant Frye said she enjoyed working at NHGRI. "I took pleasure in helping build up the DIR. It's a young institute, full of dynamic, energetic and wonderful people."

She now looks forward to not rising at 4:00 a.m. or making the 100 mile round-trip commute between NIH and her home in Lovettsville, Virginia.

December, 1997
Alagille syndrome gene discovered.

January, 1998
Mutated gene that causes Hirschsprung's disease identified.

February, 1998
DNA chip technology used to analyze a region of the BRCA1 gene in chimpanzees, gorillas, and orangutans.

July, 1998
Microarray tissue chip developed to illuminate process of cancer development.

August, 1998
Publication of data management and analysis tools for gene expression arrays.